

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04  
NSAE-00 SIL-01 CU-04 AID-05 DHA-05 NSC-05 DODE-00  
PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 MCT-01  
SSO-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 NSCE-00 /083 W  
-----081406 220024Z /72

O R 212332Z OCT 77  
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6131  
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE  
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 7333

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: ELAB, PINE, PINT, SHUM, EC  
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AFTERMATH OF AZTRA STRIKE INCIDENT

REF: QUITO 7285

1. SUMMARY. GOE HAS LAUNCHED A HARD-LINE DEFENSE OF ITS ACTIONS IN DEALING WITH OCT 18 AZTRA SUGAR MILL STRIKE, BLAMING VIOLENCE AND DEATHS ON UNION LEADERS AND OPPORTUNISTIC LAWYERS. GOE ALSO APPEARS TO BE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF INCIDENTS TO CONTINUE ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST LABOR CONFEDERATIONS, ARRESTING SOME AND ORDERING THE ARREST OF A NUMBER OF OTHER CEOSL AND CTE LEADERS. PUBLIC REACTION TO THE INCIDENT REMAINS GENERALLY APATHETIC, WITH EVEN NORMALLY MILITANT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNABLE TO MOUNT SUCCESSFUL PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS. PRESS IS PLAYING IT VERY CLOSE TO THE VEST, RAISING SUSPICION OF INFORMAL GOE "GUIDANCE". POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE GENERALLY CONDEMNED GOE ACTION AND SUPPORTED WORKERS. MUTED PUBLIC AND PRESS REACTION IS NO DOUBT DUE TO SOME EXTENT TO FACT THAT LITTLE FACTUAL INFORMATION HAS BEEN MADE PUBLIC. THUS, RUMORS CONTINUE TO ABOUND, SOME CITING UP TO 120  
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DEATHS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER ANY EFFECTIVE PROTEST WILL BE MOUNTED. END SUMMARY.

1. LABOR MINISTER JORGE SALVADOR CHIRIBOGA HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE LATE OCTOBER 20 IN WHICH HE APPARENTLY SET THE TONE FOR THE GOE DEFENSE OF ITS ACTIONS IN THE OCTOBER 18 INCIDENT AT THE AZTRA SUGAR MILL WHICH RESULTED IN THE

DEATH OF AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF WORKERS. SALVADOR TOOK A VERY HARD LINE, BLAMING THE STRIKE ITSELF AND ALL SUBSEQUENT EVENTS ON "AMBITIOUS LAWYERS AND UNION LEADERS INTERESTED ONLY IN PERSONEL BENEFIT". HE DECLARED THAT THE STRIKE WAS ILLEGAL, AND THAT THE GOE'S HAND WAS FORCED BY THE FACT THAT MANY OF THE WORKERS OCCUPYING THE MILL WERE ARMED WITH MACHETES. HE LAMENTED THE FACT THAT SOME STRIKERS HAD DIED BUT IN NO WAY ADMITTED THAT THE GOE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR DEATHS.

2. MEANWHILE, THE AZTRA MILL AND THE NEARBY COMPANY TOWN OF EL TRONCAL REMAIN CLOSED OFF TO OUTSIDERS AND OCCUPIED BY "HUNDREDS" OF POLICE. THE RESULT IS THAT THE FACTS OF WHAT ACTUALLY OCCURRED REMAIN OBSCURED AND RUMORS CONTINUE TO FLY. GUAYAQUIL RUMORS ARE THAT AS MANY AS 120 PERSONS WERE KILLED, AMONG THEM WOMEN AND CHILDREN (DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE WORKERS INVOLVED WERE FIELD HANDS WHO OFTEN TAKE THEIR FAMILIES WITH THEM WHEN THEY GO TO HARVEST). ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT HAS REPORTED THAT DEAD HAVE BEEN GIVEN A "CHRISTIAN BURIAL", ONLY A VERY FEW BODIES HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO FAMILIES, ALL OF THEM DROWNING VICTIMS. UNION SYMPATHIZERS CHARGE THAT THE REMAINDER HAVE BEEN BURIED SECRETLY BY THE POLICE TO HIDE THE FACT THAT THEY WERE SHOT TO DEATH.

3. SALVADOR CHIRIBOGA AND THE GOE APPEAR TO BE TAKING  
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ADVANTAGE OF THIS INCIDENT TO CONTINUE THEIR OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE NATIONAL CONFEDERATIONS. A NUMBER OF CEOSL LEADERS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND OTHERS EXPECT TO BE AT ANY TIME. JOSE CHAVEZ, CEOSL PRESIDENT, AND LUIS CORDERO, PRESIDENT OF THE CEOSL-AFFILIATED SUGAR WORKERS' FEDERATION (FETLAE) HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. IT IS NOT CLEAR YET WHETHER CHAVEZ WAS ARRESTED ON CHARGES STEMMING FROM THIS INCIDENT OR ON THE BASIS OF THE ARREST ORDER OUTSTANDING ON HIM SINCE THE ABORTIVE GENERAL STRIKE IN MAY. ACCORDING TO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL ARREST ORDERS HAVE REPORTELY BEEN ISSUED FOR JULIO CHANG, PRESIDENT OF CEOSL'S GUAYAQUIL FEDERATION FETLIG, MANUAL ARAQUE, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PICHINCHA FEDERATION (FETRALPI), AND CEOSL SECRETARY GENERAL CARLOS BURGOS. THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CTE (COMMUNIST) GUAYAQUIL AFFILIATE HAS ALSO BEEN ARRESTED AND ORDERS MAY BE OUT FOR OTHER CEDOC AND X CTE LEADERS.

4. AGGRESSIVE GOE DEFENSE OF ITS ACTIONS HAS MET THE SAME SURPRISINGLY MUTED PUBLIC REACTION AS THE EVENTS THEMSELVES. AN OCTOBER 20 DEMONSTRATION AT QUITO'S CENTRAL UNIVERSITY FIZZLED AND ATTEMPTS BY STUDENTS TO SRART

FURTHER DEMONSTRATIONS OCTOBER 21 WERE QUICKLY QUELLED BY POLICE TEAR GAS AND CITIZEN APATHY. ONLY REPORTED ACTIVITY BY STUDENTS IN GUAYAQUIL WAS A SOLIDARITY STRIKE DECLARED BY THE LAW SCHOOL OF GUAYAQUIL.

5. THE PRESS HAS PLAYED THE INCIDENT DOWN TO THE DEGREE POSSIBLE. THERE IS WIDE NEWS COVERAGE, BUT NO INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING OF ANY KIND AND GENERAL RELUCTANCE TO DIG INTO THE FACTS OF THE CASE. MAJOR COVERAGE TO DATE HAS BEEN GIVEN TO GOE STATEMENTS AND EVENTS SUCH AS MINLAB PRESS CONFERENCE. EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS INVARIABLY TAKEN AN EXCRUCIATINGLY EVEN-HANDED, MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POSITION OF LAMENTING THE DEATHS WHILE FAILING TO FIX ANY BLAME. ONE EXCEPTION WAS A HARD-LINE EDITORIAL IN OCTOBER 21  
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EL TELEGRAFO OF GUAYAQUIL WHICH LAID THE BLAME AT THE DOOR OF "LABOR AGITATORS".

6. THE GENERAL PUBLIC REMAINS APATHETIC. ALTHOUGH THE PRESS HAS GENERALLY NOT MENTIONED HIGHER DEATH FIGURES THAN 23 TO 25, THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA HAS AND IT IS COMMONLY RUMORED THAT MANY MORE DIED. NONETHELESS, LITTLE PUBLIC INDIGNATION OR CONDEMNATION OF THE GOE HAS SURFACED THUS FAR. POLITICAL PARTIES, ON THE OTHER HAND HAVE ALMOST UNIFORMLY CONDEMNED THE POLICE ACTION AND EXPRESSED FULL SUPPORT FOR THE WORKERS. OF THE MAJOR PARTIES, ONLY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS TAKEN A POSITION OF BEING CRITICAL OF BOTH SIDES.  
BLOOMFIELD

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## Message Attributes

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